AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS’ PERCEPTION OF DANGER IN DURBAN, JOHANNESBURG AND CAPE TOWN

Hermanus J. BLOEMHOFF

Department of Human Movement Science, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, Republic of South Africa

ABSTRACT

The safety and security of tourists has increasingly become a concern for the tourism industry. Since tourism is particularly sensitive to changing tastes and external dangers, violence - whether actual or potential - can seriously impede tourist activity through the creation of perceptions. Perceptions of risk and safety are of paramount importance in the decision-making process of tourists since perceived risk, whether exaggerated or realistic, impacts on intentions to travel. The purpose of this study is to determine how tourists perceive danger within the urban holiday environments of Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town. Furthermore, it aims to establish whether gender, group composition and time of day have an influence on the perception of danger. A questionnaire developed by Carr (2001) was used for this study. The author deconstructed “danger” into five separate but interrelated components, namely how safe, threatened, vulnerable, relaxed and at risk tourists feel. The data on which this paper is based was collected from a convenience sample of 197 international tourists interviewed at the international airports in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. This study found that the level of danger is perceived to be higher at night, and that similarities of perception exist between male and female respondents. Although group forming may act as a safety net, no significant differences were found in the perceptions of danger between the groups. Cape Town is perceived to be the safest city, followed by Durban. Although the three selected destinations are perceived to be relatively safe, the differences in perceived danger between the three destinations have a major impact on the willingness of international tourists to recommend these destinations to potential international tourists, thus illustrating the sensitivity and significance of perceptions of danger. Strategic planning is needed to improve safety and security in these urban settings. This will minimise the perceptions of danger as well as the negative impact of such perceptions.

Key words: Perceived danger; Safety and security; Urban destinations.